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Gary, Elbert Henry

Remarks by
Elbert H. Gary, chairman...

[New York?]

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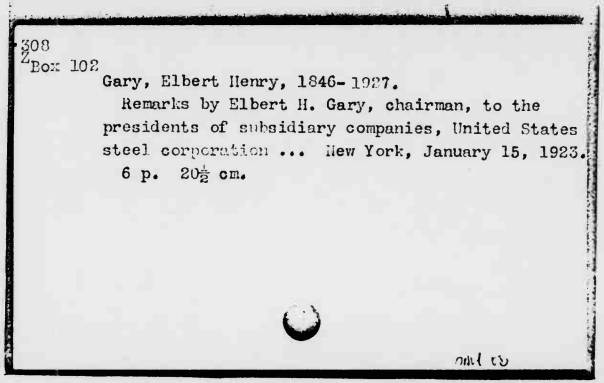
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REMARKS BY

ELBERT H. GARY

CHAIRMAN

TO THE PRESIDENTS OF SUBSIDIARY COMPANIES
UNITED STATES STEEL CORPORATION

71 BROADWAY, NEW YORK

JANUARY 15, 1923

To the Presidents of the Subsidiary Companies,
January Meeting, 1923:

THERE has recently been published by G. P. Putnam's Sons a book entitled "Analysis of the Interchurch World Movement Report on the Steel Strike" by Marshall Olds, with foreword by Jeremiah W. Jenks, Ph.D., LL.D., Research Professor of Government and Public Administration, New York University.

I think none of us was previously informed in regard to many of the salient facts disclosed in this book. Certainly they have been a revelation to me. They will in many respects probably be a surprise to the large majority of the clergymen of this country who read this book.

From the facts as stated in this volume, and apparently abundantly verified, it appears that the whole "movement" against the steel industry of the United States, culminating in the Interchurch World Movement report, so called, instead of being impartial, was prejudiced, grossly unfair and venomous.

It would seem that several well-intentioned men were used as "cats'-paws" to create an unjustified prejudice. It may be imagined that, because of their connection with the movement, these men will be deeply chagrined by exposure of these facts and circumstances.

Moreover, there are furnished additional reasons why it has sometimes been insisted that the large majority of clergymen of this country have declined to approve the "Interchurch" report, and that many of their leaders, as well as

numerous prominent public speakers and writers, and also leading newspapers have openly repudiated it.

While we properly have resented the unworthy attack against the steel industry by the persons actively taking part in this report, still we have been wise in waiting with patience for dispassionate, disinterested and thorough examination and comment by others concerning the whole subject matter rather than to have involved ourselves in a public discussion which might be considered as partisan and influenced by personal interest.

Many, perhaps most of you, and members of the steel industry generally, have entertained a different view, but considering the deserved high standing and positive wide-spread influence of the churches generally and their representatives, it is believed "forbearance" was a "virtue;" that all in all it was better to wait for an intelligent and exhaustive review by one whose impartial spirit and good reputation, to quote Doctor Jenks, could not be questioned.

Though it might be natural with some, it is hoped that no one whose feelings have been hurt by the Interchurch Movement report will harbor any sentiments of antagonism to the churches generally. We must depend upon them for the best realization and maintenance of moral and Christian sentiment which we believe is fundamental to the establishment and growth of civilization and personal safety. However, we need not willingly submit without resentment to continuous imposition, especially if it is willful and uncalled for.

In this connection, with grateful appreciation, reference is made to a splendid letter written by Mr. William U. Follansbee, dated November 11, 1922. Also to an address November 22, 1920, by Rev. E. Victor Bigelow, Minister, South Church,

Andover, Mass., entitled "Mistakes of the Interchurch Steel Report," heretofore widely circulated, and which closes with the following words: "In the name of decency, the Interchurch Commission's report must be repudiated." And again to large numbers of able editorials in leading newspapers throughout the country.

It is deemed appropriate at this time to reiterate certain principles long since adopted by the Corporation.

We believe in and insist upon full and uninterrupted observance of the laws of our country as we understand them. We have not always clearly understood what could or could not be lawfully done in the management of industrial affairs. Indeed, the pronouncements by the courts during the last two or three decades concerning the Sherman Law, so called, have appeared to be more or less contradictory. Opinions of the legal fraternity have differed. Members of the Congress of the United States who were directly and actively connected with the passage of these laws have seemingly given contradictory views. But, after much consideration and able discussions, there have resulted definitions, interpretations and applications which have in a large measure cleared the legal atmosphere, and it is thought the lawyers can, with considerable confidence, now give advice which may be relied upon, especially as the Department of Justice and others connected with the Federal Administration are disposed to assist in guiding industry along lines of procedure which are safe. Nevertheless the responsibility of proceeding carefully and safely in the conduct of our business is with us and we must act accordingly. If we should find ourselves in danger of committing a serious error in construction or application of the laws, it is better to make a mistake against our own

interests. This you know has been our policy and it will not be changed.

Again, as heretofore often expressed, we consider of the highest importance the management of our affairs in accordance with undoubted moral principles. Our promises, to whomsoever given, expressed or implied, should invariably be fulfilled. We believe from every standpoint this is the correct attitude and course. Our duty toward all others, including the general public requires this and we may not for a moment disregard or minimize this obligation. Besides, if only from a desire to secure the largest legitimate and justifiable pecuniary results, our business should be carried on in accordance with established moral principles. We shall not always be credited with entertaining or acting in conformity with these ideas especially by those who are misinformed or vicious; nevertheless after being certain we are right, let us proceed and allow the consequences take care of themselves. We need not be swerved from our purposes by criticisms from others, if deliberately and conscientiously we conclude we are right.

We may and probably will be asked but decline to do or not to do certain things which give us much concern, because after the most painstaking construction and in view of all the surrounding circumstances, we meet insurmountable difficulties.

Of equal importance and, in fact, connected with the question of moral principle, is involved the treatment of our workmen. They must always be treated justly, fairly and humanely. Working conditions must be safe and reasonable. If the work is arduous and continuous, the hours must be comparatively short. If the hours on duty are long, there

should be frequent rest interruptions. No workman will be asked or permitted to work to the injury or prejudice of health. The living conditions of the workmen and their families must be healthful, comfortable and pleasant. There should be constantly maintained, up to the highest standards of propriety, facilities for enjoyment. Churches, schools, gardens, recreation grounds are essential. There must be no abatement of the large expenditures which we have been making for these purposes.

I trust we will give no cause for reasonable complaint. This is our obligation and equally our pleasure.

As you know, the steel industry generally for several months has been making a study of the twelve-hour day. Up to the present the committee appointed to consider the question has been unable to report. I do not think a report will be forthcoming before the May meeting of the Institute. By that time I expect the committee can present their views to the large membership of the industry for their consideration.

I am not going to argue in favor of the twelve-hour day. I am opposed to it if and when it can be eliminated; not because I think it is necessarily harmful, but largely for the reason that there is more or less public sentiment against it. This I think does not include more than a very few of the workmen themselves.

My brothers and I were born and raised on my father's farm. Up to the time I was seventeen we worked on the farm about half the year, and pursued our studies the other half. Our breakfast was not later than six o'clock. Our work, including chores, on the farm occupied on the average at least twelve hours per day and the work was hard. Our study

hours were about as long. This regimen did not hurt us boys physically, mentally or morally; and we did not in those days possess the facilities for farm work without heavy manual effort which are now enjoyed. Possibly farm labor is not considered, even under previous conditions, as strenuous as labor in manufacturing lines.

At any rate, times and notions have more or less changed so far as laborers are concerned, and this is probably a correct view, although large production is of the highest importance when passing upon economic progress and prosperity. As you know from previous utterances, I have been and am very much worried over the twelve-hour day question. With you I am looking for a solution. I am glad that we have materially reduced the number of men on duty for twelve hours per day. Whatever you can do to further decrease the numbers I trust will be done and without unnecessary delay.

I am much pleased that the seven-day working week was long since entirely discontinued at our plants. It will not, of course, be resumed, notwithstanding large numbers of other employers still pursue this practice.

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